Shelby Dillman-Luis Barrios

Dear Journal,

I am a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and I am protesting the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, originally known as the School of the Americas. This school is a training facility where military personnel from Latin America where students are given instruction and then are told to use it when they return to their home countries. It was even nicknamed the “school of assassins,” because too many graduates from the school have been involved in infamous crimes. Crimes including the murder of four nuns in El Salvador were performed by these graduates. This facility needs to be closed!

At least I am not alone in my protests. Al Simmons, Kristin Holm, Diane Pinchot, and Theresa Cusimano joined me. My fellow protesters and I trespassed onto the Fort Benning Military Base in Georgia to promote our ideas for closing the School of the Americas (this is where the school is now located.) We were all aware that there’d be consequences following our actions.

Dear Journal,

On January 26, 2009 Simmons, Holm, Pinchot, Cusimano, and I were convicted to two months of jail by a federal judge in Georgia due to our previous protests. Louis Wolf, was also convicted to six months of house arrest. So few people have been willing to go to jail for their beliefs, and I am proud to be one of them. *The Third World traveler*, said this about the school o the Americas “When they return to their home countries, graduates of SOA hold a unique and peculiar view of their countrymen. The look upon priests, social workers, journalists, and liberal intellectuals, not as assets to their societies, but as dangerous subversives, working to undermine the system that keeps these soldiers, army officers, and their sponsors in power.” This is obviously a dangerous facility. There are obvious consequences to my actions of course, jail time is one of them, and sometimes my life is even put on the line. But there are potential benefits to what I am trying to achieve. If I succeed with my protests, then the School of the Americas will be closed down so no more students can graduate and lead violent, terrorizing lives.

Dear Journal,

There are many people who agree that the School of the Americas should be closed. However, not many believe that I should have trespassed onto the property of the Fort Benning military base. I’ve heard that The School of the Americas has even been associated with torture as well as other crimes against humanity. Too many graduates of that place have then gotten themselves involved with horrible crimes including murder. That is what drives me to close that place down. Nobody should go to school to be trained to go home and cause terror to civilians. The people who run that school should also be punished for the training war crimes and possibly even genocide.

By doing what I did in attempt to close down the school, I received a lot of media attention. Before that however, I wasn’t very popular. It all happened once I committed that *crime*. It was all over the television news and newspapers that I had gotten arrested. Sometimes it became overwhelming and frustrating that people only saw what I had done wrong without considering what I was trying to accomplish.

Dear Journal,

I do not regret the experience even though it landed me in jail. I want people to see what I’m trying to do and why that school is inappropriate. It teaches others to purposefully cause harm to others. When we first came up with the idea to enter the military base I thought it was a great plan and had no worries whatsoever. I thought that I would have everyone convinced and that people would all start to agree with me. However, when the day came, I was excited and very nervous, though not nearly enough to stop me. In 2000, the school was closed, but it was reopened one year later and given the new name, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. That name change didn’t change what was going on within the facility. Unfortunately, the School of the Americas is still open today. Even though I have yet to reach my ultimate goal, I at least know that I have informed many more people about the horrors of that school. I have hope that one day it will be closed down for good.